

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Wai Sinn Char

Wai Sinn Char, son of immigrants Man Hoon and Yen Kun Char, was born in Honolulu on June 14, 1902.

He attended McKinley High School between 1918-1920. He earned his high school diploma in Omaha, Nebraska. He later attended Creighton University where he received a degree in dentistry in 1926.

For the next four years he practiced dentistry in China. He was employed at the Yale-Hunan Hospital, the Shanghai Chinese Red Cross Hospital, and the Margaret-Williamson Hospital.

Returning to the islands in 1930, he joined the staff of the Strong-Carter Dental Clinic at Pālama Settlement. He left the Strong-Carter Dental Clinic in 1934 to open his private practice.

Retired since 1979, he and his wife, Bertha, maintain an active lifestyle and an interest in community affairs. The Chars are parents of five children.

Tape No. 27-16-1-97

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Wai Sinn Char (WC)

Honolulu, O'ahu

April 8, 1997

BY: Michi Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

[Note: Also present at the interview is Bertha Char (BC), WC's wife.]

MK: This an interview with Dr. Wai Sinn Char on April 8, 1997 in his home in Honolulu, O'ahu, and the interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Okay, Dr. Char, tell me when you were born.

WC: I was born in Honolulu, 1903. See, the Chinese calendar is 1902, so on June 14, 1903 would be.

MK: And what number child were you in your family?

WC: My---in my family?

MK: Mm hmm [yes].

WC: (Third—four sons, seven daughters.) My father [Man Hoon Char] and mother [Yen Kun Wong Char] (pause) came from China. They're from Canton, Nam Long district. My father came here in 1876 (age nine years old) to work for the plantation over here, because they couldn't get people to work here. So he came here, and he landed in Kaua'i. Instead of working for the plantation, he worked for a restaurant in Kaua'i. After ten years, he came to Honolulu from Kaua'i. He learned how to make watch, repair watch, jewelry. So he learned how to make jewelry for the [Hawaiian] monarchy. He used a tusk of a pig and things like that. He also make the Hawaiian coat of arms. So after that, he had a place on Nu'uanu Street. (Pause) A saloon next to his store. And opposite is the Love's Bakery on Nu'uanu Street. So he stayed there for quite a while.

Then he consulted his brother about having a wife. So [the brother] went to China and got a wife, my mother, from the Nam Long district, Canton. He brought her over here to marry my father. They were married and through that marriage, then she borne twelve children, but one was (dead)—because of childbirth, so there's eleven of us. There's four boys, and seven girls. (I was number three.) And of the four boys, Nick Char, later on he graduate from Creighton, because he once—Nick Char—served in the First World War. (He was one of) the first nine persons who volunteer to go to . . .

BC: France.

WC: Yeah, France, as a . . . So he went to France, to Château-Thierry. There he served over there. When Nick was in France in [the] First World War, of the nine volunteers, he was one of them, when the armistice was signed, to come back to America. But before the armistice was signed, A. Kau and George Tom were—died, killed. A. Kau happened to be the famous Chinese pitcher for the CAC, Chinese Athletic Club here. So they called 'em afterwards, the Kau-Tom Post, [No. 11, American Legion] over here to remember them. Then after, I'd say, about. . . .

MK: Your brother Nick served in World War I in France.

WC: Yeah, yeah. As for my educational program, I was . . .

MK: Oh, I think before we go . . .

BC: Four brothers.

MK: . . . before we go into your education, can you tell me about your other brothers and sisters?

WC: Before we go ahead—all right. As I was saying, my mother was supposed to have twelve children, but one, as I say, because of childbirth, miscarriage. And I get four brothers, and seven sisters. The brothers, Nick Char, later on he's the lawyer; Harry Char, he's a automobile mechanic; myself, later on I'm a dentist; and Robert, he's number eight in the family. And Robert supposed to be a good student, he's very bright. Athletically he's very good. So he haven't the opportunity to better himself, but he seems to be. . . . See, while my brother was in Shanghai, he sent for us to go to Shanghai with myself and Robert. So we went to Shanghai, and my brother Robert, because of the language barrier, see, China, he go to school over there, and he's handicapped of that. So he missed school. (Chuckles) After all, he didn't have that educational background. See. He, Robert, later on came back to Honolulu. He worked for Pearl Harbor [Naval Shipyard] in the storage airplane department. And now, that's why came—as far as the educational background, my educational background.

MK: What number son were you in your family?

WC: Me? I'm number three.

MK: The third son?

WC: Yeah, third son. But see, Harry Char was working for Pālama Settlement as a automobile mechanic, repair, see. Now, of my educational program . . .

MK: Oh, wait now. Before we go into that, when you were a small boy, where did you grow up? Where was your family living?

WC: When I was small boy? Well, my family moved from—my father come to Honolulu, we live on Nu'uānu Street, see, that what I said, where Love's Bakery was opposite of the—next to that is the saloon, and behind is the Bijou Theater. What's next now?

MK: So when---you were born over there?

WC: Yeah, I was born on Kukui Street. There's a lane. When you going to [the] lane, there's a Chinese[-language] school over there. I was born in that Chinese school [area].

MK: And then, what kind of neighborhood was it?

WC: The neighborhood is more of a---people who are living---just like a homestead over there, in that neighborhood. Common people. There's mostly Chinese in that neighborhood. So what's next?

MK: You grew up in the Kukui area?

WC: Yeah, yeah. That's where I was born, that Chinese school in there, from Kukui Street the lane go in there.

MK: When you were a child, when you were a boy going elementary school, were you still living in that area? Same place?

WC: When I was born---no we---not in the same place. When we came, my family lived on that Nu'uaniu street so I went to Kauluwela School. At Kauluwela School at that time, had only four grades. And the principal was Mrs. (Nina) Creighton. And my fourth-grade teacher happened to be related to me. Mrs. Molly Yap, through my mother's side, see. So after that fourth grade, I went to Ka'iulani School, to finish up. So I finished 1917, that's the time of the First World War. Then, my cousin said, "Why don't we go to work?" I was a boy, I say it's not a bad idea. So I work for Hollister Drugs [Hollister Drug Co.]. I stayed there a couple of months. I was there to take care because---help in the stockroom. Then I went to Honolulu Construction and Draying Co. [Ltd.] as a bill delivery boy. I ride a bicycle, I deliver bill. I didn't stay there long, then I went to Honolulu Iron Works [Co.] in Kaka'ako as a office boy. I stayed there not too long, but I was promoted as assistant cashier. My job was to go to all the different shops: the boiler shop, mechanical shop, machine shop, pattern shop, the shipping shop, and the blasting shop.

So after that, I thought about going back to school. So I left and I went to McKinley High School in 1918. McKinley High School at that time was on Punchbowl and Beretania Street, opposite the park over there (Thomas Square). That's the last year of Dr. [Marion] Scott. Then after that, Mr. (Willard) Givens became principal. With Mr. Givens, in my junior year, Mr. Givens said, "All this group go to Dorothy Stender's class." And Dorothy Stender was, you know, duplex bungalow behind the main building. So when I first registered in Dorothy Stender's class, I talked to one of my classmates there. I said, "How do you like this Dorothy Stender?" I think to me, she looked mean with a (MK chuckles) pair of glasses, looked strict. And I don't like her appearance. I don't think we going have a hard time to get by in her class.

So I finally said, "We should have a sign, on the sign written, 'Ye who enter here, all hopes are gone.'" And she heard that remark. She looked, came out, she noticed that I'm the one that said that remark. And she didn't like the idea to call her. So while I was in her class, all my compositions she give D. All D, D for grade. One day, one time, she give me a A-. I say, "Gee, by gosh, I going fail in her class." So when my brother came back from war in France,

he stopped by at Omaha, Nebraska, and he took up law. At that time—at Creighton University. At that time, law only took three years. So the way he get enough money, he worked as a waiter in a chop suey house. That job only pays fourteen dollars a month, now. (Chuckles) So, of course, you go over there at the chop suey house, you eat over there before the morning session. But not for Saturday or Sunday, not that day. Saturday and Sunday, he get paid only fourteen dollars a month. So that, he asked me if I want to continue my education as a transfer student to Omaha Central High School. I said, "Nick, you only send me the passage money, and I will come." So when I ready to go, I went to see Dorothy Stender. I said, "I'm going to leave you. Aren't you glad that you get rid of me?" And, "I'm going to be transferring to Omaha Central High School." She didn't say anything. (MK chuckles.)

So I went on a, more like freight boat. And I happened to be the only Oriental to go to Mainland college. So I have to verify my passport certificate. So after that I went to Omaha to go to high school there. I took a plane and I went to Omaha, arriving at Birmingham station. And there was no one to greet me over there. So I asked how I can get to my brother's place on the streetcar. So I bought token, I think four tokens for twenty-five cents. And I asked, "Can you take me to Capitol Hill Avenue?"

He said, "Sure."

So with the token, instead of paying one token, I dropped all four tokens in there; I don't know any better. So I went---he took me to Capitol Hill, but my brother wasn't there to greet me. So anyhow, I took a chance and went to my brother's place. My brother already have reserved a place for me to go to Mark Cove residence to live over there, to make arrangement over there. From that, first wife get one child, one daughter. So when I landed in Mark Cove residence I say, "Where do I live?"

He said, "Down the basement."

"Where is my bed?"

"You see the army cot over there?" That's my bed.

"How am I going to take a bath?"

"You see that big pan of water? You put water in there, and go under the pipe to take a bath."

I said, "Where do I hang my clothes?"

"You see that packing box over there? All you have to do is put some hooks over there," to hang my clothes.

"What do I have to do?"

"You have to get up about 6:30 in the morning, and if there happens to be cold, you go out and shovel snow, or put the ski chain on the tire. And then after you get through, you put coal in the furnace to warm us on the second floor."

I said, "Oh, okay." So I did that. But after that, when I went upstairs to do my duty, they have

tile floor, I go on my knees to take care the tile floor. Then I go upstairs, I have to take care the bathtub, clean 'em up. And come back downstairs, put on my jacket to serve them on the table.

And they used to brag, say, "I have to get this person here all the way from Honolulu to take of serving us on the table."

So I did that. And after a while, they even tried to make me as a chauffeur. They have a nice car, okay. So I drove the car, and then I rode on the sidewalk, on top. And that's the last time I can drive a car. I say, okay. After that experience, I went back—it only paid your board—went back to my brother's place. And there, I went and worked for chop suey house as a waiter. They paid me fourteen dollars a month. Good days. You go over there in the morning, you have breakfast over there. The only thing, Saturday and Sunday, I get paid for fourteen dollars a month, see. Three and a half, three and a half, that's fourteen dollars a month. So after a while—I worked there for—Mandarin Chop Suey House—for six years, at fourteen dollars a month. They take care two years in high school and four years in college. There, I managed all right.

In 1923, my brother graduate from Creighton Law School. Okay. And then, at Creighton Law School, so he talked to me, he said, "Wai Sinn"—that's my name, Wai Sinn—"you think you can continue to take care yourself? Or else I'll send you back to Honolulu."

I said, "Don't worry, Nick. I work at fourteen dollars a month."

MK: So you supported yourself in Nebraska . . .

WC: Yeah, yeah.

MK: . . . by working at the chop suey house, yeah?

WC: And so I was working over there, working hard. So one time, this waiter, Chinese waiter, there's a party that came in. This Chinese waiter thought that he's supposed to be the head waiter. And during that Chinese—what you call—New Year Eve, he gave the booth downstairs to two White man waiter. See, the booth. So it happened that one time, my friend brought his girlfriend, going to the White man waiter booth. The two persons happened to be something like from my class at Central High School. I just went in there to say hello, and the Chinese waiter say, "You better get out from there. That's not your station. That's the White man station."

I say, "You better. . . ." He make *da kine* face, if you don't get out from there. He go like that [swung at], my eye. I sock 'em by his jaw. He fell down, and he went for the kitchen knife. I said, "You come over here. You see the bottle here, I going smack 'em right on your face, you come over here." And then I told Mr. Ching Jin, the. . . .

BC: The owner.

WC: The boss, the manager there, "I quit. I don't want to start any trouble." So this guy here, belongs to the tong. He come, come find out where I try to live. So he get his hatchet man, with revolver, went up to my apartment. God bless myself, I wasn't home. That saved my

neck or I get killed. So after a while, I still . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

MK: So Dr. Char, when you were going to high school and college in Omaha, you worked at the chop suey house, and then when you had that problem with the waiter, you quit, yeah?

WC: Yeah.

MK: But you still continued in school, and you graduated from Creighton Dental School in 1926, yeah?

WC: Nineteen twenty-six.

MK: I was wondering, what was it like being a student, Chinese student in Omaha?

WC: Oh. Well, when I went in my freshman year to Creighton dental college, there were three Oriental and one Colored person, South. Oriental, one is Fujita. Because his lack of knowledge of English, his first semester, he drop out. The other one is D.L. Chang. Chang came from Kaua'i to go to Creighton dental college. And he is a very smart person, Chang. But Chang thought that he would like to work in the chop suey house with me so he can save some money to go college. So at one time, (you know that) we eat on a round table. And I was careful because I don't want to contract any kind of disease, see. So Chang wanted to do the same thing, but he contract TB, tuberculosis. So he thought of going back to Kaua'i because of that disease. So on the way to home, he passed away in San Francisco. So I was the only one (Oriental) in the whole class to graduate from Creighton. We have eighty-one in the freshman year. We ended up with fifty-one. They had thirty drop out. And then I was---I think I'm the only Oriental (in that class, 1926), fifty-one. So after all this, I was the only one.

MK: How did you do as a student at Creighton? How did you do in school at Creighton?

WC: I made top grades. Nine of that, A⁺, 95 and above. Nine of that, B⁺, 85 and above. And one C.

MK: How come you had the C?

WC: Well, in pharmacology. And then I have C in prosthetics. This person, Dr. Frank Viner, he has, I don't know, seems to have. . . . Because I'm the only Oriental in the whole class there. One time I have White woman there, elderly woman. And I supposed to take impression to make a upper (and a) lower plate. And for twenty times he make me take (those) impressions all over again. And finally he let me go out.

Then when I graduate . . .

MK: You know, before you tell me when you graduated, I was wondering, how come you decided to be a dentist?

WC: I always think about being a dentist, or a medical doctor. But a medical doctor take too long a time. He take four years pre-medic, and four years medicine, and two years internship. I say too long. I would like to be a medical doctor. So I change my mind. Dentistry is only four years. No pre-med.

MK: And when you were away in Omaha for so long, what did your parents feel about this?

WC: Well, you see, my parents feel that I'm pretty capable guy to take care of myself. The only time when I get one hundred dollars from my folks, because my tuition (in the junior year). That's the only time I get one hundred dollars. So when I finish college, still (pause) I was lucky to get by because that Chinese waiter I punched in the jaw get his hatchet man and tried to get into room. But good thing I wasn't home. And then---what you want me to say about . . .

MK: When you graduated from Creighton, what happened to you then? What did you decide to do after you graduated from Creighton?

WC: I graduated with high honors. And then one of my classmates [said], "Aren't you going to take the Nebraska board [exam]?"

I said, "What I want to take the Nebraska board [exam]? I'm not going to practice in Omaha. I'm going back home! In Hawai'i, Honolulu."

[He] said, "You go back to home? You starve to death."

I said, "Why?"

"Because grass shack, all that. Where you get enough clients to work?"

I said, "Don't you worry. Not in Honolulu."

See, the Honolulu board, we have a big population in Honolulu. No chance of starving over there. So I came back to Honolulu. (Pause) I came back to Honolulu to practice dentistry. And I stayed---my first office on Nu'uuanu Street. Bijou Theater, behind. After a while, I moved to King Street. And King Street, opposite of C.Q. Yee Hop [and Co.]. I had a place over there. But after a while I moved again. I moved---see, I have a job on Pālama Settlement, dental clinic [Strong-Carter Dental Clinic].

MK: Oh, before we go into the Pālama Settlement dental clinic, I know that after you graduated from Creighton, you wanted to come home and open up an office, yeah? Practice, be a dentist in Honolulu.

WC: Yeah.

MK: But you went to China, though, yeah? How come you went to China?

WC: Well, I went to China because my brother went to Shanghai, he's a lawyer. And he's very good friend to Dr. Sun Fo. And Sun Fo the son of the first president of China. That's Sun Yat-sen. See? So he was affiliated with Sun Fo in Shanghai as a lawyer. So when he was

there, later on he send me. When I came back from the Mainland, I took the dental board [exam]. I didn't pass. I failed. So Paul Woo and myself, we failed. And we went to—Paul went to Hong Kong and I went to Shanghai because my brother was there. So my brother reserved a place to go to the interior of China to Hunan-Yale Hospital. Why they call it a Hunan-Yale Hospital, it's a missionary hospital. It's supported by the Yale mission fund and the Rockefeller Foundation Fund, and the China medical board fund. There I was the only dentist in the Yangtze [River] Basin—in there. So I was there one year [1926–1927]. Then Changsha, Hunan, that's the host residence. I went to Hankow. And Hankow happen to have millions [of] people. It's more like a Chicago of China.

And Dr. F.C. Yen, superintendent of Hunan-Yale Hospital came to Hankow and said, "Hey Doctor, your own practice in Hankow. You have million[s]—you, you're the only graduated dentist in the whole Yangtze Basin."

I said, "I don't mind."

"Above my pharmacy I have room for you. You can set up your practice over there."

As soon as he said that, my brother came from Shanghai, prepare to get equipment for me to practice in Hankow. But as soon as he have that (ideas) Madame Sun Yat-sen [Soong Ching-Ling] came to Hankow. "We started the women's suffrage." They marched on the street with knives and guns. "We want equal rights!" with the menfolks.

I said, "Oh, this is no place for me to practice." So I went to Nanking.

Nanking was one time the capital of China, see. So I went over there, nothing but dirt road. And sometimes those representatives from other countries, they have to live in tents! And only beautiful road is go up to Dr. Sun Yat-sen mausoleum, concrete road.

"Ahh, this is no place for me." It's too primitive. So I went to Shanghai. And Dr. F.C. Yen, you know, formerly of Hunan-Yale Hospital, more like superintendent, was made minister of health. And he came to Shanghai.

He said, "Dr. Char, I want you to be the head dentist of the Chinese Red Cross Hospital, and the Margaret Williamson Baptist Hospital [1928–1930]. And also I was with the Dr. C. Jackson.

After three years my folks want me to come back to Honolulu to work for Pālama Settlement Strong-Carter Dental Clinic. So I gave up everything.

MK: You know, before . . .

WC: But before that, my girlfriend in Shanghai, which I had been going with for two years. We about ready to [get] married over there, you know. But her mother and myself go to see a fortune-teller. And the fortune-teller [said], "You have to wait." He's blind. "You have to wait an hour or so because he smoke opium." And when he came downstairs he asked, "What you come here for?"

I say about four things. First, to get married. Second, to whether I will marry here or

someplace else. Third, how many children will I have. And fourth, how long I'm going to live. So with all that thing. He predict, the blind fortune-teller.

He said, "First, do not—you may not marry here. You marry some other place. (Then) you be happier if you marry someone." Second, he say, how many children I will have. He say, "You'll have three boys and two girls," which is correct.

And then I say, "How long I going live?"

"Ninety-six years old."

Now I'm ninety-four. I have two more years to be alive. (Chuckles)

MK: So good fortune-teller.

WC: Yeah, he's good fortune[-teller]. So I say, "Okay." So I came back to Hawai'i because. . . .

MK: So you went to see the fortune-teller, the fortune-teller told you, "No, you're not going to marry here in China . . ."

WC: Yeah, marry someplace else.

MK: " . . . you marry someplace else, you'll be happier."

WC: Yeah, which is true.

MK: And that you'd have five children.

WC: Yeah, yeah. All is pretty good.

MK: And then you'll live to ninety-six, yeah?

WC: Yeah.

MK: So you decided to come back to Hawai'i.

WC: Yeah. Then, well, what else you want me to tell?

MK: I think for today, I'm going to end the interview over here, and then the next time I come, I'm going to ask you about Pālama Settlement.

WC: Oh, Pālama Settlement? I'm going to tell you right now.

BC: No, she's going to interview you next time.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 27-21-2-97

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Wai Sinn Char (WC)

Honolulu, O'ahu

April 30, 1997

BY: Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto (MK)

[NOTE: Also present at the interview is Bertha Char (BC), WC's wife.]

MK: This an interview with Dr. Wai Sinn Char at his home in Honolulu, O'ahu, on April 30, 1997. The interviewer is Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto.

Okay, Dr. Char, you tell me what happened after you graduated from your dental college in 1926. What happened after that?

WC: I came home with the intention of getting a license to practice dentistry in Honolulu. So I took the dental board [exam], and I didn't pass the board, I failed. So Dr. Paul Woo also took the board, and he failed. So we went to the Orient. Dr. Paul Woo went to Hong Kong, and I went to Shanghai to meet my brother, Dick Char, see. He said, "I get a place for you in the Hunan-Yale Hospital in Changsha, Hunan. You'll be the head of the dental department." So I went there.

I took the riverboat, went to Hankow. At Hankow I went to Wuchang, I took the train to Changsha, Hunan. So when I get to Changsha, Hunan, I met Dr. F.C. Yen. He's the superintendent of Hunan Yale Hospital in Changsha, Hunan. So I asked Dr. Yen where I'm going to live. And he said, "You see that sanitorium? You go live over there with Dr. Chang."

So we went there. And this sanitorium was empty. Just two of us. We occupy the place, this sanitorium. And during the winter months, we heat ourselves with a pan of charcoal over there. And in case we go to the toilet, we have to walk about six yards to a place where they dug a hole, way down. We had to sit on a board. That's our way of—we have toilet facility. So that was what happened.

And after those incidents, we have to vacate the premises and go back to—first we tried to go to Hankow. I told you about Dr. Yen had a place over there, you see. He wanted to give you your office over there. And my brother Nick from Shanghai came up to fix me an office in Hankow. And Hankow have about three-and-a-half [3.5] million people. "You'll be the only graduated dentist in the whole Yangtze Basin." So that was about ready to settle, then Dr. Sun Yat-sen's wife came over to Hankow and started a women's suffrage; "We want equal rights with the menfolks."

I said, "Well, if that's the case, I don't want to practice in Hankow." So I went to Nanking. I was told Nanking was open, you see. The only beautiful road goes up to Dr. Sun Yat-sen's mausoleum. I said, "I don't want to practice there, I think." So I went to Shanghai. While I was at Shanghai, the Dr. F.C. Yen was then head of—minister of health. He came to Shanghai and made me head of the Chinese Red Cross Hospital, dental department, and also the Margaret Williamson Baptist [Hospital] dental department. I was there for the minister of finance, from 19—I make the gold plate for him. And after that, I was called back to come back to Honolulu.

MK: Who called you back to Honolulu?

WC: My family called me back, to come back to Honolulu to work for Pālama Settlement [Strong-Carter] Dental Clinic.

MK: How did you get the job at Pālama Settlement?

WC: Well, this time I took a board [exam]. While you take the board, you have to work on fourteen different examination, fourteen subjects. And then you have to have a clinic where you have a broken gold crown or the patient make a partially jacket crown. I also make a set of the full upper and lower dentures. I did that. And so that was all that. Then after a while, I passed the board [exam]. When I passed the board they gave me three months' option whether I qualify or not. So after two months, I worked so fast, and things like that, at first they [Strong-Carter Dental Clinic] give me \$200, gave me \$50 extra, see. Because instead of one year, they give me—I had four years, see. The most I get is \$275. (Chuckles) After a while, I said, "Well, I got enough, I come out and practice, private practice."

MK: Before you started your private practice, I want to ask you more questions about the Pālama Settlement, okay?

WC: All right.

MK: Okay. At Pālama Settlement, who was your supervisor? Was there a supervisor at Pālama Settlement?

WC: Dr. Philip Platt, P-L-A-T-T. He's the superintendent of Pālama Settlement.

MK: What kind of man was Dr. Platt?

WC: He's the superintendent of the Pālama Strong-Carter children's dentistry. He was a nice man. After staying there for four years [1930–1934], I went back to private practice. [WC recalled others who once worked at the clinic: Dr. Pritchard, Dr. McKinley, Dr. Conner, Dr. French, Dr. Ruben Lee, Dr. Lee Chong, Dr. Arthur Lehr, Dr. Campbell, Dr. Adrian Brash, Dr. Griffin, Dr. Fred Kagiara. He also recalled registrars, Mabel Taylor and Gladys Crosby. Annie Kerr, Rachel Voeller, and Carrie Correa Chang were also employees.]

MK: And at Pālama Settlement, who were the patients? Tell me about the patients that came to the clinic.

WC: Children. Children's dental clinic. And they only pay, I think, about fifteen cents [a visit].

BC: Ten cents, I think it was ten cents [a visit].

WC: Huh?

BC: Ten cents.

WC: Ten cents, ten or fifteen cents. Ten cents.

MK: So children came and paid about ten cents.

WC: About ten cents. And those children, about 150 of them. One time, only had five dentists, three of them sick. Only had Chuck Chu and myself. I said, "All right. A hundred and fifty patients, you take half, I take half." (BC chuckles.) I think we worked so fast that we finished ahead of time. (MK chuckles.) So we went behind and played cards. And Dr. Platt come around, he look us, we playing cards. Finished work. [The clinic closed at 3:30 P.M.] Realizing that we were all finished work, he don't say anything, see. So that was from that time on.

MK: So you treated many children at Pālama Settlement?

WC: Yeah, at that time, 150, well, I take half and Dr Chu take half.

MK: How about other times? Did you treat adults at the clinic, too?

WC: Oh yes. When you're there, every three months they put a man downstairs, they take care the adult patients. But they used to take care of only sixteen patients, adult patients. But when I was allocated downstairs, instead of sixteen I get double the amount because I work fast. I said, "Okay." That's why, I line 'em up, I see all those people. The ones need extraction, sit down over here. See, I line 'em up that way. I finish, then I even drove the patient to their home with my car! (Chuckles)

MK: And you told me you did extractions? What kind of services did you give? What kind of treatments did you give at Pālama?

WC: For the adult?

MK: Uh huh [yes], for adults.

WC: Extraction, and if they want to make plate work, anything like that, we do, I do them. Not only extraction alone. That's easy, extraction. Yeah, we do. So if they come, what they need I did all that for.

MK: And the patients, where did they come from? Only Pālama or outside of Pālama?

WC: On the outside of Pālama. All over. They know about what we can do to help them, see.

MK: Were some people referred to Pālama or they come on their own?

WC: They heard about it, they come on their own. We had plenty patients, more than we can—ordinary time, we handle only sixteen. But I handle more than that when I get downstairs

[adult assignment].

MK: What was most of your work? Extraction or plate work . . .

WC: Plate work, anything.

MK: All kinds?

WC: Yeah, all kind work.

MK: What were your hours? From what time to what time did you folks work?

WC: From eight o'clock to four o'clock. Of course, lunch hour, well, there was one-hour lunch, yeah.

MK: And were some parts of the year or some parts of the week more busy than other times? What were the busy times for you?

WC: Busy time? Well, the busy time is when other doctors get sick, and then we have to handle what's left. One time only two of us left.

MK: And you know the Strong-Carter Clinic, how were the facilities?

WC: You have modern facilities there. The machines run by electricity, and all that. Yeah, it's a modern facility.

MK: Were they the same type that a patient would see if they went to a private doctor?

WC: Yeah.

MK: Was there any other place on the island that was like your clinic, the Pālama Settlement clinic where people could come . . .

WC: No, no more.

MK: . . . for cheap dental care?

WC: No more, because they have to get the money to facilitate such a clinic. You have to put up all the money.

MK: You mentioned that when you were all *pau* with your work, sometimes you played cards when you were done with your work. What else did you do in your spare time at Pālama Settlement?

WC: Sometimes, when we have spare time, I go out there and play tennis. And sometimes I go over there and shoot pool. Used to have a pool table over there. So that's what I do. They laugh at how I play tennis over there.

MK: And then I know that you left Pālama Settlement in 1934. How come you left Pālama

Settlement?

WC: Well, from one year they give me four years. So I left there. I said, "I think enough." I get enough where I open office on Kukui Street.

BC: Liliha Street.

WC: Well, I passed the---it's a duplex house on Liliha Street.

BC: Yeah, that's Liliha Street. We had our first place, you bought the equipment there. And it's still there, that's how my grandmother came to you. Then after that we moved, after we got married.

MK: So Mrs. Char said that your first office was Liliha Street, then later on your second office was on [66 South] Kukui Street.

BC: Kukui Street, yeah.

MK: And then you had that Char Professional [Center] Building, yeah?

WC: Yeah.

MK: When did you retire from private practice?

BC: I think he was seventy-seven years old.

WC: Oh, when I'm seventy-seven years old.

MK: Oh, that's a long time, yeah?

WC: Yeah, eighteen years [ago].

MK: My goodness.

WC: I retired for eighteen years.

BC: Over that already.

MK: I know that you married Mrs. Char about six months after you started at Pālama Settlement, yeah?

WC: Nineteen thirty-one [August 13, 1931].

MK: How did the marriage happen? How did this marriage come about?

WC: While I was in Shanghai, I used to go [steady] with a girl for two years with the intention of getting married. Then they take me to a fortune-teller, the mother and the girlfriend. And this fortune-teller happened to be blind. And we have to wait one hour because he smoked opium before he comes downstairs. And when he come downstairs, he say, "Why you come over

here for?"

I think I tell him five things. First, about marriage. Second about. . .

BC: Business.

WC: About business, whether if I have good business or not. Third, whether I—what now?

BC: Children, how many children.

WC: How many children I'm going have. Fifth, how long I'm going live.

BC: Health, your health. Yeah, are you going to be well-off, strong.

WC: How good of health. Yeah. So the fortune-teller told me first about marriage. "This girl, don't marry, you. All of a sudden, you [will be] called away to another place. And there you marry a girl over there, and then you be happier there than if you get married here. And second one . . ."

BC: Business.

WC: Business. He say from 1929, twenty years, your business is fine. And then . . .

BC: Five children.

WC: "How many children will I have?" I going have five children. And he mentioned three boys and two girls. Correct. And then, "How long I going live?" I going live to ninety-six years old. The last one . . .

BC: Your health.

WC: "How about my health?" I going have good health.

He say, "Probably you cannot live longer than that, ninety-six."

BC: When you were forty, that's the only time you had that terrible—he had five carbuncles. He [fortune-teller] said in itself [his health] is good, but only time, he's going to have a bad sickness. We don't know what it was. And then five carbuncles all over his body. And real big ones, too. Ooh! I used to take care of that. But that's only thing.

MK: Only time.

BC: Everything he told was true.

MK: Everything turned out true, yeah?

BC: Yeah, that Chinese [fortune-teller].

MK: Very accurate, yeah?

So you came back to Honolulu, and how did you end up marrying your wife?

WC: Well, while I was here, when I came back from Shanghai, at first I thought to get the Chinese girl come over here. So I send 'em the passage money to come over here. And the friend of mine took that girlfriend in Shanghai to go to the American consulate to tell them that this girl would like to come to Hawai'i to marry me, see. American consulate, I think, turned them down. Cannot come. So she told me about that. I said, "Well, if that's the case, you keep the money that I sent to you for your passage money. You go your way, and I go my way." So that was agreeable.

So then one day, her grandmother . . .

MK: Your wife's grandmother.

WC: Yeah. Happened to be a patient of mine, and asked whether, "You are married or not?"

I said, "No, I wasn't married or not."

So, "I want to introduce to you my granddaughter."

[She] wanted introduce to me her granddaughter. I said, "Okay." She was working in Waikiki as a car waitress.

BC: Carhop at a drive-in.

WC: So I went over there and see her over there. So I give her a big tip. (MK chuckles.)

BC: Big tip, one dollar.

(Laughter)

WC: Big tip.

BC: Those days was big money, you know. I was still going to school, and then I have evening job.

WC: And she was happy about that. Then after that. . . .

BC: We went---oh, taking me all over the place, weekends.

WC: Huh?

BC: Weekends you used to take me to that temple, Mormon temple, and K C Drive-In, movies.

WC: Weekend I used to drive an old Studebaker car. And this friend, a Hong boy, came with me, you know, as chaperone or something like that. So we drove around, you know.

BC: Went to movies, this and that, you know, different things.

WC: Movies, everything.

BC: And I finally decided to marry him after two weeks' courtship.

MK: After two weeks you decided to get married?

WC: Yeah, two weeks. At first, I said, "Hey, you're only eighteen or nineteen years old . . ."

BC: Eighteen.

WC: ". . . eighteen years old."

BC: [Nineteen] twenty-nine.

WC: "You're about to finish high school." I said, "Don't you think that you're too young for me?"
And she said, "My mother didn't think so."

(Laughter)

BC: My mother said it's okay.

WC: I said, "If that's the case, let's get married this coming Friday." Yeah?

MK: Oh my goodness.

BC: Thursday, thirteenth.

WC: Thursday. So Thursday we went to the first Chinese church opposite of McKinley High School, that Chinese church. And she wear an ordinary gown.

BC: Chinese dress, design.

WC: And I wear a suit of clothes. We got married. The minister is Reverend Char.

BC: Char, in Mandarin, Shar.

WC: Char. Yeah, Char, and we get married.

BC: And he was speaking in Mandarin, and we didn't know what he was talking about.

(Laughter)

BC: We get married, anyway.

WC: We get married. And after, when we have the reception . . .

BC: It was the funniest thing. I didn't know what he was talking about. He [WC] didn't know Mandarin.

- WC: We have reception in the old Lunalilo Home. Ice cream and cake and sandwich.
- BC: In those days, ice cream and cake. No big parties like now.
- WC: Big party after we get married. Then we . . .
- BC: Liliha Street, we lived on Liliha Street.
- WC: And we drove around with the Studebaker car, and all that stuff. And after a while, after Liliha Street . . .
- BC: We moved to Kukui Street.
- MK: After Liliha you moved to Kukui Street.
- BC: One sixty-seven.
- WC: Oh yeah, 167.
- BC: Yeah, not duplex. This was not a duplex. The first one, Liliha Street was a duplex. And then we moved to Kukui, it's a cottage, and then has a side garage. Except that cottage . . .
- WC: And that cottage belongs to C.T. Wong, vice-president of Liberty Bank.
- MK: Oh, I see.
- BC: The family owned that.
- WC: And C.T. Wong let me have that cottage for seventy-five dollars a month.
- BC: Oh yeah, those days cheap rent.
- WC: Seventy-five dollars one month.
- BC: We lived there for several years. [The Chars later moved to a home on Sierra Drive.]
- WC: Mr. Lum came to me, real estate, he said, "Ey, Doctor, you want to buy a piece of property [site of Char Professional Center Building]? I can show you. It's only 2,376 square feet property."
- I said, "All right, I'll take a look." I said, "Oh, there's a fence over there, iron fence over there. Okay! I'll buy the property. Here's \$500 down."
- BC: This is why they put deposit now, you know.
- WC: "How much?"
- He said, "\$18,000."

I said, "Can you [reduce]?"

"Oh," he said, "make it \$14,000."

I said, "Well, wait a minute. I have to take out money," see. So I went to C.T. Wong, I said, "Ey—" C.T. of the Liberty Bank—"I want some money to buy a piece of property. Can you lend me the money?"

"Oh," he said, "we send some money to China for exchange of gold. We get good percentage."

I said, "Ey, I been doing business with you for eighteen or more years. I have about eighty thousand dollars insurance collateral." I said, "So lend me the money. If get it some other bank, what happen?"

He said, "Go. You folks go to some other bank."

I said, "Okay, I go." So I went to American Security Bank. And I saw William Ho over there.

BC: Ching.

WC: And they willing to lend me. I said, "Okay, fine." So I went to Liberty Bank, I said, "I'll take all, all my . . ."

BC: Accounts.

WC: Even the insurance, about eighty-odd thousand dollars. I said, "Because I go do business with American Security Bank to put up the building." And that's it.

So when I put up the first story, it was "That'll be \$145,000."

BC: No, no, \$40,000 first. You used \$40,000 of the loan.

WC: For one-story building, \$45,000.

BC: Forty five thousand [dollars], yeah.

WC: So we put up a one-story building. To get that \$45,000 from . . .

BC: Advance that time, because you borrowed money from them using your collateral, \$80,000.

WC: No, you see, you have to file, this guy here, he says . . .

BC: No, no, no. Don't talk about that.

MK: So that's the Char Professional Building?

BC: Yeah. The Char Professional Center.

MK: That's the Char Professional Center.

WC: Yeah.

MK: And then what happened to that Char Professional Center, you folks sold it?

BC: Just about 1979 we sold the building.

MK: You sold the building. So you've been retired for many years, now yeah?

WC: Yeah.

BC: Yeah, about twenty years already.

END OF INTERVIEW

Reflections of Pālama Settlement

Volume I

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